



Frequently Asked Questions

Grade 4



What is TIMSS and PIRLS?

TIMSS and PIRLS are international assessments designed to measure trends in mathematics and science achievement (TIMSS) and reading literacy (PIRLS) of fourth-grade students. In 2011, the two studies will be administered simultaneously in participating schools. Up to four classes will be randomly selected to participate, with each class randomly assigned to take either TIMSS or PIRLS.

Why was my school selected for participation?

Schools of varying demographics and locations were randomly selected so that the overall U.S. sample is representative of the overall U.S. school population. The random selection process is important for ensuring that a country's sample accurately reflects its schools and, therefore, can fairly be compared with samples of schools from other countries.

Will all our fourth-graders be asked to participate?

It depends on the number of fourth-grade classrooms in the school. In schools with four or fewer fourth-grade classrooms, all students will be asked to participate. In schools with more than four fourth-grade classrooms, only students in four randomly selected classrooms will be asked to participate.

In addition, some students with special needs or limited English proficiency may be excused from the assessment.

Who conducts the assessment?

The entire assessment process will be undertaken by trained staff from Westat, a research organization under contract to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). NCES conducts this study under authorization in the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-279, Section 153). The U.S. Office of Management and Budget has approved the data collection under OMB # 1850-0645.

Do teachers need to help administer the assessment?

No. Westat staff will visit the school on the day of the assessment, bringing with them all the materials required, and they will handle the entire administration of the assessment.

When will the assessment be conducted?

The assessment will be conducted between April 4 and May 27, 2011. Westat will work with schools to identify an assessment date convenient for the school in that time period.

Where will the assessment be conducted?

The assessment will be conducted in the schools that are selected to participate.

How long does the assessment take?

The assessment session is approximately 2½ hours and includes the administration of the assessment, a brief questionnaire that students complete about themselves, and two breaks. The questionnaire takes approximately 30 minutes to complete.

What will happen with the collected data?

The data from the assessment will be used to evaluate how the knowledge and skills of U.S. students compare to those of their peers in other participating countries. By law, the data provided by schools, staff, and students may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose (Public Law 107-279, Section 183 and Title V, subtitle A of the E-Government Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-347)). Reports of the findings from the assessment will not identify participating districts, schools, students, or individual staff. Individual responses will be combined with those from other participants to produce summary statistics and reports.

Are schools required by federal law to participate?

No. School participation is voluntary. However, we hope you will participate in this study so that students like those in your school are accurately and fairly represented.

What do school staff and students do?

- Schools are asked to designate a School Coordinator to assist Westat staff members with in-school arrangements.
- The school principal or lead administrator will receive a School Questionnaire to complete. The questionnaire, which asks about the school environment and structure, takes about 20 minutes to complete.
- Teachers of the sampled fourth-grade classes will receive Teacher Questionnaires to complete. These questionnaires focus on the nature of implemented curricula, instructional practices, and attitudes toward reading, mathematics, and science. They take about 30 minutes to complete.
- Students will attend the assessment session (2½ hours in length) and will be asked to complete the assessment booklet and questionnaire. Those who do will receive a small gift as a thank-you.

Please feel free to contact the U.S. TIMSS–PIRLS Home Office with any questions via email TIMSS-PIRLS@westat.com or by calling **1-888-369-5033**.